

to remain in inaction, a man looks round for information as eagerly as a benighted wanderer would for the light of a human dwelling. He perhaps labours to recall what he thinks he once heard or read, as relating to a similar situation, without dreaming at that time that such instruction could ever come to be of importance to him ; and is distressed to find his best recollection so indistinct as to be useless. He could give a considerable sum, if some particular book could be brought to him at the instant; or a certain document which he believes to be in existence; or the detail of a process, the terms of a prescription, or the model of an implement. He thinks how many people know, without its being of any present use to them, exactly what could be of such important service to him, if he could know it. In some cases, a line, a sentence, a monosyllable of affirming or denying, or a momentary sight of an object, would be inexpressibly valuable and welcome. And he resolves that if he can once happily escape from the present difficulty, he will apply himself day and night to obtain ¹ knowledge, not concerning one particular matter only but divers others, in provision against possible emergencies, rather than be so involved and harassed again. It might really be of service to have been occasionally forced to act under the disadvantage of conscious ignorance (if the affair was not so important as to allow the consequence to be very injurious), as an effectual lesson on the necessity of knowledge in order to decision either of plan or execution. It must indeed be an extreme case that will compel a considerate man to act in the absence of knowledge ; yet he may sometimes be necessitated to proceed to action when he is sensible his information is far from extending to the whole of the concern in which he is going to commit himself. And in this case, he will feel no little uneasiness, while transacting that part of it in which his knowledge is competent, when he looks forward to the point where that knowledge terminates ; unless he be conscious of possessing an exceedingly prompt faculty of catching information at the moment that he wants it for use; as Indians set out on a long journey with but a trifling stock of provision, because they are sure that their bows or guns will procure it by the way* It is one of the nicest points of wisdom to decide how much less than complete knowledge, in any questior